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**For Immediate Release**

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**Big News for the Big Skies:  
More Direct Flights Slated for Montana this Summer**

**Helena – March 15, 2006** - Montana is flying high from the prospect of more visitors having non-stop service to the state this summer. Following a wave of flight reductions and airfare increases, Montana's tourism industry is encouraged by recent news regarding airline service to the state.

In recent weeks, both Delta and United Airlines have announced the addition of more non-stop flights to Montana from several of their major hubs.

"It is very encouraging to see the airlines taking these strides to open up Montana to more travelers," notes Governor Brian Schweitzer. "We know what a great place we have here and we're excited to be able to make our slice of heaven more accessible to our visitors."

Citing Bozeman as "one of the fastest growing leisure destinations in the country" Bob Cortelyou, Delta's vice-president of Network Planning, announced that Delta will be offering twice weekly round-trip flights between Atlanta and Bozeman beginning June 8<sup>th</sup>. Atlanta, the nation's largest airport hub, provides connecting service from a multitude of international and national destinations, particularly along the east coast, opening up more opportunity for quicker more manageable travel to Montana.

In addition, United Airlines just announced that Billings, Bozeman and Missoula will be receiving direct flights from Chicago's O'Hare International Airport. Being the nation's second busiest hub, Chicago also provides connecting service to an expansive array of destinations. Billings and Missoula will have the flight available weekly, while Bozeman will have the direct connection offered daily through September 5, 2006. Brian Sprenger, Assistant Airport Director for Gallatin Field, noted that it bodes well for three Montana cities to get their "foot in the door" with this direct service to Chicago. In terms of Bozeman, Sprenger is optimistic that these flights will do well for United which could open up the opportunity to expand into potential weekend service for the winter months.

The Flathead Valley will also be seeing improved air service with the return of American West/U.S. Air for the summer months which will provide daily direct access between Glacier Park International Airport and Phoenix. This route will be served by the 100-seater Airbus during the height of the summer season.

According to the 2001 Nonresident Visitor Survey conducted by the Institute for Travel & Recreation Research, 19% of visitors to Montana traveled by air for at least one portion of their trip. These new flights will enhance Montana's accessibility to the rest of the world thus opening up new opportunities for vacation travel to the state.

Tourism and recreation is one of Montana's largest industries. In 2005, over 10 million people visited Montana spending \$2.1 billion during their stay. Over 29,000 jobs are directly supported by nonresident travel, resulting in over \$531 million in total personal income for Montana residents.

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